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SUBJECT: IRANIAN MAJLES ELECTIONS--PARTIAL RESULTS IN, BUT RUNOFFS
ARE NECESSARY

REF: A. RPO DUBAI 0012; B. RPO DUBAI 0008; C. RPO DUBAI 0013; D RPO DUBAI 0010

RPO DUBAI 00000014 001.2 OF 002

1.(SBU) Summary: Partial Majles (parliament) elections results from Tehran indicate that, as expected, conservatives dominated the elections in that important constituency. In Tehran, 14 of the 30 seats have been decided, and all of those seats have gone to conservatives. However, it is difficult to delineate between pro-Ahmadinejad hardliners and the president's conservative critics. According to Iranian press, runoff elections will be held in late April for the remaining 16 seats in Tehran, as well as for seats in 17 other constituencies. Final elections results for the entire Majles will not be available until after the runoffs. The partial results also indicate that reformers fared better than expected in provinces outside Tehran, however they nonetheless remain a minority in parliament. Iranian press have reported differing percentages of voter turnout, varying between 60-65%, although an independent calculation of the numbers reported suggest it could be as low as 52%. In the concurrently-held Assembly of Experts by-elections, the influential senior cleric Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani was elected to one of the Tehran seats on the Assembly. End summary.

Conservatives dominate Tehran -- based on partial results

2.(SBU) According to the partial elections results for the important Tehran constituency, conservatives dominated as expected, but it was unclear how many of those conservatives are supporters of President Ahmadinejad. The two main conservative coalitions each put out electoral lists that served as voting guides for the public (reftel A). One of the two main groups, the United Front of Principle-ists (UFP), has been associated in the press with President Ahmadinejad, but the UFP list also includes some of his most vocal conservative critics, such as current Majles speaker Haddad-Adel, deputy Majles speaker Bahonar, and Majles Research Center head Tavakkoli, all of whom were re-elected on Friday.

3.(SBU) The other major conservative coalition, the Broad and Popular Coalition of Principle-ists (BPCP), was created by former National Security Council Secretary Larijani, former IRGC commander Rezaie, and Tehran mayor Qalibaf, all of whom ran against Ahmadinejad in the 2005 presidential election. Larijani, Rezaie, and Qalibaf are regarded as more traditional, pragmatic conservatives. Although their views on nuclear and

foreign policy issues do not appear to differ greatly from the established government policies, they have criticized Ahmadinejad at times and indicate a greater willingness to engage with the West and the international community (reftels B, C). International press coverage of the elections has cast the UFP list as pro-Ahmadinejad, and the BPCP list as his conservative critics, however as noted earlier, the UFP list features some prominent Ahmadinejad critics. To further muddy the waters, the UFP and BPCP lists for the critical Tehran constituency had nine candidates in common, making it difficult to delineate between pro-Ahmadinejad hardliners and the president's conservative critics.

Reformers gain seats in provinces

4.(SBU) Reformers have reportedly fared better than expected, according to the partial results. Reform groups are now expected to gain some seats in the parliament, slightly increasing their strength, although they remain a minority. In the previous Majles reformers had 40 seats. The spokesman of one of the main reformist coalitions was quoted by AFP March 16 saying that reformers were set to gain about 50 seats outside of Tehran, and expected to pick up more seats in the runoff elections for Tehran. Reformers were ultimately only able to field candidates for around 100 of 290 Majles seats. Although the ability of reformers to effect change in Iranian policy remains minimal, the fact that they won over 50% of the seats that they were able to compete for -- if reports are accurate -- would seem to indicate that the Iranian public is more supportive of reformers than the government would like to portray.

Runoffs scheduled for late April

5.(U) According to Iranian press, because only 14 candidates in

RPO DUBAI 00000014 002.2 OF 002

Tehran received the required minimum 25% of the vote, runoff elections will be held in late April for the remaining 16 seats in Tehran, as well as for seats in 17 other constituencies (Note: It is unclear from press reports how many open seats remain in the other 17 constituencies. Endnote.) Final elections results for the entire Majles will not be available until after the runoffs.

Voter turnout estimates differ

16. (SBU) Iranian press has reported differing percentages of voter turnout, varying between 60-65%, although independent calculation of the numbers reported suggest it could be as low as 52%. In differing reports in the Iranian press on March 15, Interior Ministry figures of 65% voter turnout were cited, and alternately Interior Minister Purmohammadi said that 60% of eligible voters took part in the elections. However, the same press report citing the 60% figure also gave the number of votes as approximately 22.8 million, which when calculated represents about 52% of the 44 million eligible voters in Iran. There was no explanation in the press reports of the discrepancy.

Assembly of Experts by-elections

7.(U) In the concurrently-held Assembly of Experts by-elections, the influential senior cleric Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani was elected to one of the Tehran seats on the Assembly. See reftel D for discussion of possible long-term significance for the position of the Supreme Leader.

BURNS